

“The last summer of peace”: Imperialist powers rearm for global war

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“Perhaps this is the last summer of peace,” said right-wing German historian Sönke Neitzel in a television appearance in March, which is currently the subject of much media commentary in Germany.

Neitzel made this statement not as a warning of a catastrophe to be averted, but as a militarist argument for an acceleration of German rearmament, particularly in preparation for war with Russia.

Germany, Neitzel said in a subsequent interview, needs a revival of “*Soldatenkulturen*” (soldier culture), a leading example of which, he said, was the German army under Adolf Hitler. The *Wehrmacht* understood how important the “soldier culture” was. It conveyed “identity, cohesion, and motivation” with “songs, with uniforms, with awards, with badges.”

Eighty years after the end of World War II, Neitzel’s declaration of the “last summer of peace” echoes the tone of the imperialist agitation that preceded the First and Second World Wars. German General Friedrich von Bernhardi’s infamous 1911 treatise *Germany and the Next War* argued that war was “a biological necessity” and the motor of human progress. According to Bernhardi, war in Europe was “inevitable.”

Bernhardi sought to mask the concrete, predatory designs of German imperialism, which would go on to attempt the conquest of Europe twice, with generalities about war being the condition of mankind. He was giving expression to a war fever throughout ruling class circles in Europe prior to the global conflagration, which killed 15 to 24 million people.

Similarly with Neitzel, whose talk of a “last summer of peace” articulates the bloodthirsty plotting of all the imperialist powers.

It must first of all be asked: If this be “peace,” what does war look like? Israel, with the support of the United States and the European powers, is

exterminating the Palestinian people; Europe’s largest land war since World War II is raging in Ukraine; and US President Donald Trump has just bombed Iran.

But something far larger is being planned, and the ruling classes are amassing weapons to carry it out. Earlier this year, the German government pledged to triple its military spending over the next decade. On Sunday, German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier called for the reintroduction of conscription, while last week, the German parliament held a budget debate in which Chancellor Friedrich Merz declared, “The tools of diplomacy have been exhausted” in relation to Russia.

While Germany is setting the pace for European rearmament, all of the European imperialist powers are massively expanding their military spending. At last month’s NATO summit in The Hague, the alliance committed to increasing military spending to 5 percent of GDP.

Across the Atlantic, in the cockpit of imperialist war planning, the United States under Trump is making increasingly direct plans for war in the Pacific, targeting China, even as it escalates war throughout the Middle East and recently announced plans for new armaments to Ukraine.

Over the weekend, the *Financial Times* reported that the Pentagon has formally demanded that Japan and Australia make statements pledging to go to war with China alongside the United States over Taiwan. “Concrete operational planning and exercises that have direct application to a Taiwan contingency are moving forward with Japan and Australia,” one official told the FT.

All of these fronts—in Europe, the Middle East, and the Pacific—are increasingly being referred to in the media as the opening skirmishes of a new world war.

An article published in the *New York Times* by Ross Douthat asks, “Who Is Winning the World War?” Douthat concludes, “If the United States and China eventually fall into a ruinous war, then the struggles in Ukraine and the Middle East will be retroactively assigned to histories of World War III.”

He adds, “It’s useful for Americans to think about our situation in global terms, with Russia and Iran and China as a revisionist alliance putting our imperial power to the test.”

Why, one might ask Douthat, should Americans be concerned about the fate of “our imperial power?” What interest do they have in the unrivaled domination of the American ruling class throughout the world—its control over natural resources, technologies, raw materials and markets—not only against the “revisionist alliance” of China and Russia, but also in relation to its erstwhile allies in Europe?

The fact is that the same ruling class pressing for world war is waging a war against the working class, in which social programs, wages, and fundamental democratic rights are to be sacrificed in the name of “our imperial power.”

Douthat’s comment points to the fundamental forces driving the war plans of the imperialists. While the US-NATO war against Russia was billed as defending Ukraine against “Russian aggression” and the Gaza genocide is sold as “self-defense” by Israel, the real reasons for the global war drive are the efforts of each of the imperialist powers to secure their global hegemony.

In the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, US imperialism, together with the other imperialist powers, set out to redivide the world through imperialist violence over decades of war. These conflicts are now coalescing into a globe-spanning war, with Russia, Iran, and China emerging as central targets.

As Leon Trotsky explained in “The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International,” the founding document of the Fourth International, written in 1938 on the eve of the eruption of the Second World War:

Under the increasing tension of capitalist disintegration, imperialist antagonisms reach an

impasse at the height of which separate clashes and bloody local disturbances (Ethiopia, Spain, the Far East, Central Europe) must inevitably coalesce into a conflagration of world dimensions. The bourgeoisie, of course, is aware of the mortal danger to its domination represented by a new war. But that class is now immeasurably less capable of averting war than on the eve of 1914.

Every imperialist country in the world faces mounting popular opposition and a constellation of social, economic and political crises, to which they see war and dictatorship as the only solutions. In the United States, the Trump administration is seeking to establish a presidential dictatorship in the face of mass protests and would welcome a war as a means to expand presidential rule by decree.

The most dangerous aspect of the present situation is the lack of awareness within the working class of the scale and implications of the imperialist powers’ war plans. While tens of millions have protested the Gaza genocide and the Trump administration’s drive toward presidential dictatorship, there is not an understanding of the broader global war drive and its underlying causes.

The Socialist Equality Party is fighting to build a new international antiwar movement of the working class, based on a socialist program to abolish capitalism—the source of war, inequality, and dictatorship. This means uniting workers across all national boundaries in a conscious political struggle to dismantle the imperialist war machine, overthrow the rule of the financial oligarchy, and establish workers’ power as the foundation for a new society based on equality, peace, and democratic control over economic life.



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